

A Feast of the Senses

ADVENT



Christmas is a multi-sensory delight; the chill in the air, the fragrance of pine, the beautiful lights, the tempting treats, the lilting carols. We will come together to share our stories and experience Christmas through our senses.

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Week 1

Zechariah and Elizabeth
Luke 1:1-25

This begins the Advent season, what are some of the ways that you practice Advent in your life?

Opening Ourselves

Let us set aside the cares of our day and open our eyes to the wonder of God. With an attitude of empathy to the people of another time let us open our hearts and minds to God. Let us experience God's word to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit. (Taste and See, 13)

Enter the Story

Smell the incense Frankincense - a fragrance of pine and lemon.

See the angel – is the angel glowing, clothed in white?

Hear the silence – how does silence affect you?

Are there any other senses that are lifted up in the passage?

While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar. Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John."



What might God be inviting me to be or to know or understand?

The angel's first words are "do not be afraid" is there an area in your life that God is instructing you not to be afraid?

What are the smells of Advent?

Advent Wreath

Today you will make an advent wreath together – a means to remain centered on experiencing God’s creative world during advent.

Supplies: Small Grapevine wreath

Assorted winter herbs(lavender, rosemary, thyme) small dried flowers, garlic clove, dried peppers, (cut uniform size wrap small bunches with wire)

Wire, small mason jar, ribbon

Add bunches to wreaths, hot glue or wire other items. Take time to smell and appreciate the aromas of the herbs.

Included are short inspirational verses for each day of Advent. Print them off and place them in a small mason jar, a small box or bowl. Each day take one slip and read it.

During the week...

Consider in the quiet moments – before bed, while doing a simple task. How might God be leading me through this passage? How is the noise in my life, especially the noise I make creating an obstacle to hearing God?

Closing



God grant us the wisdom and courage this week to be opened to surprises. To taste and see your presence in new ways. To trust you will do good and joyful things in our lives and in the world. Amen (T&S 19)

Rosemary, a symbol of fidelity and remembrances once used in the holiest of Christian ceremonies.

Week 2

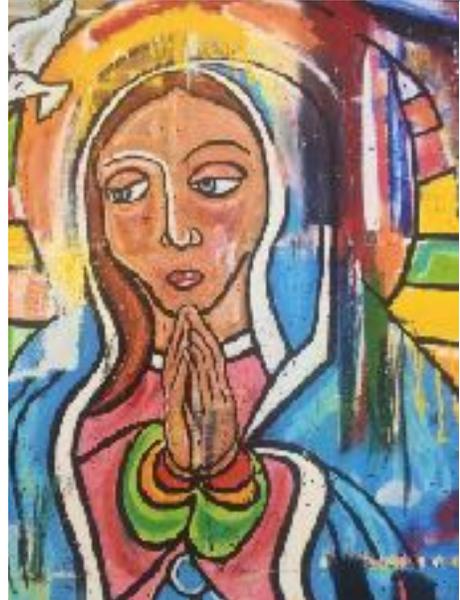
Gabriel Visit's Mary *Luke 1:26-38*

Opening Ourselves

God, who are the Most High Lord of all,
 you have a surprising preference
 for people who are small and humble
 and who expect everything from you.
 You chose Mary, the unassuming virgin
 from Nazareth,
 to become the mother of your Son Jesus.
 Through your Holy Spirit
 make us aware of the poverty of our hearts,
 that we may be open to you and welcome you,
 be ready, like Mary, to serve you and your plans,
 and expect everything from you.
 Come to us and give yourself to us
 through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From *Liturgies Alive, Models of Celebration. Spirit. (13)*

Enter the Story



God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you! What might God be inviting me to be or to know or understand?"



Hear the voice of the angel.

See the face of Mary. What is the expression on Mary's face when she hears the angel's greeting? What feeling accompanies this expression?

What are the sounds of Advent? What is a favorite Christmas or Advent song?

Mary's response to God's unimaginable request is "Here I am your servant"

How do you imagine Mary answering, with fear and trembling, quick and assures, quiet and meditative?

▶ **What has God asked of me that God is waiting for our response?**

During the week

Consider a song that expresses your deeper self. Listen to and sing this song each day? How is the song fostering the yes in your spirit?

Listen to two Christmas hymns and consider how the different music styles bring you into the Christmas Story.

You may choose your own or use this suggestion:

Welcome to Our World.

https://youtu.be/F6livTQ_Coc

Discipleship Ministries offered some insight into the song [https://](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-welcome-to-our-world)

www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-welcome-to-our-world

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Discipleship Ministries offered the history and theology of this beloved hymn by Charles Wesley <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oy2aCXpRRA>

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-hymn-expresses-longing-for-arrival-of-our-savior>

How does the sweet simplicity of Welcome to Our World compare to the majestic powerful Come Long Expected Jesus?

Closing

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Go with us now into the world.

We can begin again!

Everything is about to change.

So make everything new.
Make us new.

Reveal your glory in our lives
and in the rhythms of our lives,

so that nothing will get in the way of your coming. Amen

Week 3

Joseph and His Dreams *Matthew 1:18-25*

Opening Ourselves



O God of all seasons and senses, grant us the sense of your timing to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons.

In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold, teach us the lessons of endings; children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying, grieving over, grudges over, blaming over, excuses over.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.

In this season of short days and long nights, of grey and white and cold,

teach us the lessons of beginnings; that such waitings and endings may be the

starting place, a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born— something right and just and different, a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love— in the fullness of your time. O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

~ Written by Ted Loder, in *Guerrillas of Grace*.

What are the sights of Advent?

“When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.”

Enter the Story

How can I be more faithful in my calling, as Joseph was in his calling?

How can I demonstrate more faith, as Joseph did in accepting Mary and Jesus and protecting them in the face of fear?

The Christmas story is full of episodes of fear. God comes into a world of chaos and fear with a clear message, do not be afraid, I am with you. Today we still have a need to hear this message from God, it comes to us in dreams and in miraculous ways. It also comes in times of prayer and study, in times of gathering together with those we trust.

Tidbit: Love Christmas lights? Combine the appreciation of the wonderful decorations in your community with a prayer. As you drive up and down the streets enjoying the sights pray for your neighbors.

▶ **What fear are you called to let go of this Christmas?**

Closing

We can begin again!

Everything is about to change. So make everything new. Make us new.

Reveal your glory in our lives and in the rhythms of our lives, so that nothing will get in the way of your coming. Amen

http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm#ixzz4v2E6mE00

During the Week

How will I practice seeing my calling in life as being from the Lord and then treating them accordingly?



Week 4

Mary Gives Birth

Luke 2:1-7

Opening Ourselves

In this season of expectation

We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah

Into the bustle of our lives and the hard to find moments of solitude

We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah

Into our homes and situations along with friends and families

We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah

Into our hearts, and those often hidden parts of our lives

We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah

For beneath the surface of your story is an inescapable fact

You entered this world as vulnerable as any one of us

in order to nail that vulnerability to the cross.

Our fears, our insecurities and our sins all that can separate us from God exchanged by your Grace for Love.

We cannot comprehend the reasoning only marvel that Salvation comes to us through a baby born in a stable, and reaches out to a world in need.

In this season of anticipation We prepare to welcome Christ Jesus, Messiah

http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Advent.htm#ixzz4v2DuB6tT

▶ **Imagine all Mary and Joseph encountered in this scripture.**

How does the manger scene enliven your senses?

Do you have a special connection to a manger in your home or church?

What are the sensations (touch) of Advent?



Enter the Story

My faith journey in part was formed by the Moravians. One of my most treasured experiences was the Christmas Love feast, it is a sensory delight. The candles are made of beeswax which creates a sweet aroma when burning, singing the carols of Christmas is integral to the event. Coffee and buns are passed among the participants, traditionally in white porcelain mugs. The buns are made with citron and orange peel with a line of sweet vanilla icing. However, there are no rules, I have served Christmas Cookies and lemonade – the idea is to engage all the senses in worship.

The glow of the candles, the aroma of baked goods, the warmth of the coffee cup, the taste of the special treats, the sound of the music. This is a feast of the senses.

Tidbit:
Beeswax candles that are used at a Moravian Christmas service not only emit a beautiful sweet smell, they also are naturally dripless.

▶ **How has your faith journey formed your celebration of Christmas?**

Discipleship Ministries offers a Love Feast Order of Worship I have used on the Sunday after Christmas or when Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday, this is a good morning service. A Love Feast unlike Holy Communion does not require a clergy person to preside.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/the-love-feast>

If you would like to experience the traditional buns they are available here online.

https://shop.oldsalem.org/product/452/fresh_baked_items



During the Week

In the busyness of Christmas it is easy to be distracted. Consider some practice that is draining on your time and energy you can let go of to better serve Jesus?

Closing

May all wonder find a place in your soul
and dance with you unexpected steps;

May all joy be at home within your heart
and weave a sacred rhythm throughout this life and all to come;

May unsolved mysteries make your life an adventure
and pull you towards unknown places waiting for you since the very
beginning;

May blessing be your forever-companion
and cradle you, strengthen you and love you always;

May all stillness coorie (snuggle) into your soul
forging a peace that gives to all things a place;

May the ebb and flow of life be a daily gift
offering times of pain and celebration
and healing;
and may God let you see what others
miss:
promise cradled in every wonder,
the flow of life shaping a sacred story
where love, and you, dance together
daily.

And when eyes that have seen all living
draw into focus salvation's intent,
may they recognize at days end a
promise, a deed, a gift fresh born in the
world.

~ Written by Roddy Hamilton, and posted on Mucky Paws.

Merry Christmas

